

## **Statement in Defense of Freedom of Expression against the 'Delay' of the Celebration Screening by the Agency for Cultural Affairs**

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Film director "Singing in the Dark: Erasing the Disabled of Okinawa"

The film "Singing in the Dark: Erasing the Disabled of Okinawa" has been awarded a film prize by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. A celebration screening of the film was scheduled on 6th November, but today (5th November), the Agency for Cultural Affairs made a decision to "postpone" the screening.

**I believe the decision of postpone is a serious problem damaging freedom of expression and the public's right to know. This decision prevents a solution for the problem of social crime "Shitaku Kanchi" or home confinement, the theme of this film. I protest strongly against this decision.**

"Singing in the Dark" is a film depicting Shitaku Kanchi, a system of confinement used to exist in Japan. It was a system to isolate mental patients in cells in private lands based on the "Mental Patients' Custody Act" issued nationally in 1900.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs made a decision to postpone the screening, because there were repeated complaints from the bereaved relatives of one of the victims of home confinement. According to the Cultural Affairs, the bereaved relatives complained that "there are scenes different from the facts." However, there are no such scenes. In mid April, as they appealed, I have corrected parts of the narration that might give different impressions. However, the scenes they pointed out were related to "interpretation of history" such as how to receive the fact that they disposed the property and left the island. Such facts could be interpreted in different way, thus, I cannot accept that they used the word "the facts."

There is no incorrect description in this film.

The privacy protection is done with utmost care by not using family names or names of places. It is not possible to identify anyone in the film, and it protects the bereaved relatives' privacy. I believe it is not possible even for the press to identify the family from the names used in the film. Again, I would like to appeal that it is not possible to "damage human right of the bereaved relatives and it might not be fixed."

Certainly what this film describes about the deceased are true, yet it is not possible for the audience to know where the families of the victims in the film live. Therefore, the honor of the deceased is not violated, nor is the privacy of the surviving family members. Instead, this film has been made with my wish to recover the human right of the victims who had been harmed by the social system.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs also announced that "there is a difference of opinion between the director Hara Kazuyoshi and the bereaved family". In a film like this dealing with such a sensitive and difficult subject, it is only natural that there are differences of opinion. It is even more so if it is about interpretation of history.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs announced that they would “make an opportunity to show the film if both parties come to agreement.” I take the family’s protest as an emotional reaction. If the film screening would be postponed indefinitely for both parties cannot come to agreement, then the bereaved family would not hope for agreement. Then, it would not be possible to have a constructive discussion, and it would be equal as cancellation. Similar matters happen also in the conflicts of establishing facilities for disabled people. If government accepts establishment only when both parties come to agreement, then it is same as the government denies it, and the discussion with the residents come to an end.

I do hope that the Agency for Culture decides to do the film screening. If the bereaved family is afraid of being recognized as the family of the victim in the film, it would be necessary to asses if it is really possible. Without doing so but to “postpone” the filming is only an expedient.

The complaining family requested the deletion of all the scenes in the film that are on their relative. To delete part of the film is, indeed, to repeat the history of the patients who were shrouded in the darkness. It would hide the history once again.

I believe that the main reason for the suffering of the bereaved family is that the responsibility of the state in creating the home confinement system, and it has not been examined and overlooked until now. The Shitaku Kanchi system isolated the patients in cages, tore them apart from their families, and inflicted guilty feelings to them. Not only the patients, but the families were also the victims suffering from the system of Shitaku Kanchi. For this reason, the families had to conceal the fact of Shitaku Kanchi immediately, and hid it in darkness. It was the social system that created their oppositional feeling that they do not want others to see the confinement of their families. It was also a very natural reaction just like Hansen's disease sufferers and their families had.

I believe that the oppositional feeling of the bereaved family has to be respected and should not be ignored. This is an important problem presentation which we all have to accept socially. The Agency of Cultural Affairs’ decision to postpone the screening is not to accept the emotions of the bereaved family. Instead, they made the decision to hide the problem, to avoid it so “both parties can solve the problem,” and to abdicate the social responsibility.

When researching historical facts, is it necessary to protect honor and privacy of the deceased and their descendants over the range of legal protection? For this purpose, is it necessary not to execute the release of the film that is made based on the historical facts?

My answer is, “no.” If the facts are hidden in darkness, we would pretend as if there was no victimized patients suffering in the cages. Those confined patients suffering from the a human rights violation would stay being ignored. “Singing in the Dark” is a film that resist this state of Japanese society that condoned that situation. I have made this film with a strong belief that we need to reveal the dark past with the maximal care for privacy, that we need to learn from the past to build a better society, even there is emotional counter-view and complaints of a bereaved family. This film also represents my sincere wish for restoration of honor of the patients and their families who suffered by the Shitaku Kanchi system.

I believe it is important for law-abiding nations' agencies including the Agency for Cultural Affairs to identify whether the complaint is based on a legal ground. It is also necessary to ensure that decisions are not influenced by complaints that have no legal basis. If not, fairness as a national institution would be lost. At this time, it is only possible to understand the decision by the Agency for Cultural Affairs as to avoid the repeated complains using excuses of "a difference of opinion" and "have not tried to come to a solution."

How has the Japanese society come on a wrong way? Who have been hurt by the system of Shitaku Kanchi and how? I believe it is possible to go forward in the history by positively showing this film and by thinking together, instead of canceling screening.

Films have a power as a trigger for a social change. It is a power to liberate people from suffering and pain. I hope the Agency for Cultural Affairs promoting films believes in this power, and to come to re-evaluate the decision.

I sincerely hope that the Agency for Cultural Affairs will organize Film Award Celebration Screening of "Singing in the Dark" as soon as possible, and we will have the chance to watch and to think together again.

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